

Chapter I. Atwood's *The Penelopiad* as a Feminist Rewriting of Homer's *The Odyssey*

This research entitled “Atwood's *The Penelopiad* as a Feminist Critique of Homeric Myth” probes into the theme of retelling the Homeric myth on Penelope in the framework of contemporary feminist Critique of male writer's representation of female. This study on Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* deconstructs the Homeric myth. Atwood revisits the Homeric myth and finds the female characters being treated as insignificant. In her revisionist version, Atwood presents the female characters as bold and assertive. Instead of emphasizing on the supposed heroic and adventurous deeds of Odysseus as related in *The Odyssey*, she focuses on the stories of marginalized women of myth – Penelope, Helen, Anticlea, Eurycleia. While doing so, Atwood rewrites the feminist version of myth, which stresses on the females' experience and identity.

The classical Homeric myth always highlighted the so-called gallant mythical structure and adventurous deeds of Odysseus in *The Odyssey*. The non-present events about Odysseus are narrated with exaggeration and the present events of other characters including Penelope herself are told in haste. However, in *The Penelopiad*, Atwood highlights the stories and deeds of major female characters like Penelope, Helen, Anticlea, Eurycleia - the sidelined women in myth. In her story, Penelope portrays herself in the light of a peer consort, an equal match to a trickster hero, extending Helen's cruel remark that “[s]he and Odysseus are two of a kind” (33), to her advantage. She is a bold and frank woman. As she is interested in the technological progress of the twenty-first century, she refuses reincarnation and warns women: “Don't follow my example,” irritated at having become “a stick to beat

women with” (2). Thus, Atwood revisits the Homeric myth by emphasizing on the deeds of Penelope and other women, but not the deeds of Odysseus.

Atwood is of the idea that women are subordinated in contemporary society and recent history. Thus, she amplifies the female voices against gender oppression appointing female characters as spokespersons of her novella, *The Penelopiad*. The novella, in particular, retells Penelope’s life and at the same time demystifies the Penelope myth from the contemporary perspective. The narrator in this novella makes a bespoke response to Homeric epic, *The Odyssey*. Penelope, the wife of the wandering hero Odysseus, tells the story of her own from the underworld. She remembers about her childhood in Sparta, her marriage to Odysseus, her twelve friendly house cleaners, her keeping over 100 suitors at bay all through Odysseus’s absence, and the aftermath of his return. In Homer’s epic, Penelope - daughter of Icarus of Sparta and cousin of the good-looking Helen of Troy - is represented as the ideal model and archetypal faithful wife, a woman branded for her aptitude and reliability, who weeps and chants prayers for the return of Odysseus.

Excavating the renewed identity of women and their role in history and myth, the current research revolves round these areas of concern namely: demystifying the mystery relating to women and revisiting the Homeric myth from feminist perspective. Interspersing the memories and voices of the twelve house cleaners with the narrative thread of Penelope, Atwood revisits the history and demystifies the Penelope myth. At the same time, she blurs the archetype of Greek mythology enriching the novella with a first-rated insight of characterization. With a high-quality impression of thoughts as put forwarded by some writers like Elaine Showalter, Marry Poovey and Simone de Beauvoir, this research project attempts to give details

that in *The Penelopiad*, Atwood revisits and demystifies the Penelope myth in order to give voice to females like Penelope.

Just like *The Penelopiad*, other works of Atwood also present a sense of feminist and revisionist literature by uprising the voices of females and giving females and their literature a kind of new identity. Mostly in her works, she revisits the history as well as myth with feminist perspective. She deconstructs the identity of traditional concept of female and gives them a kind of new identity. The works of Atwood also provide a metaphor for the divisions within the human personality. In her works, Atwood constantly pits civilization against the wilderness surrounding it and society against the savagery from which it arose.

Not only *The Penelopiad*, but *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986) also deals with the issue that women are censored and suppressed by the long-established male dominated society that is absolutely controlling their freedom. Offered is a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead. Owing to low reproduction rates there, Handmaids are assigned to bear children for elite couples with trouble conceiving. Every month, when Offered is at the right point in her menstrual cycle, she must have impersonal, wordless sex with the Commander while his wife Serena Joy sits behind her, holding her hands. Restriction in Offered's freedom represents the restricted freedom of all women. She cannot leave house except to go for shopping. Her every public move is watched. Offered and the other housemaids are valued till they are fit and fine to conceive for the elites. Similarly, her *The Blind Assassin* (2003) is a story of an Irish girl who grows up well but motherless in a small town in Southern Ontario and faces a mysterious death. As an old woman, she recalls the events of her life. The novel takes the form of a gradual revelation illuminating both Iris youth and her old age before coming to the pivotal events of her life around the time of the II World War.

Likewise, in her poetry collection *Power Politics* (1996), Atwood has reconfigured the image of women that shocked the contemporary society. Very few poems in this collection are given titles.

Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, published in 2005 and nominated for inaugural 2005 Man Booker International Prize, has shaped an immense arrangement of upheavals in the field of literary criticism. As it is regarded as a contemporary sign up of the ancient myth, the novella has been a super-model from different angles of literary threshold. No myth survives if it is not read, appreciated, interpreted and criticized again and again. Thus, Atwood too in this novella has readdressed, readjusted and reinterpreted the old and stereotypical Homeric myth on Penelope. Praising the entire contents the text covers and specially appreciating its comic and parodying taste, Nicole Estvanik in *Literary Journal*, evaluates the novella as a comic relief. He writes:

The Penelopiad's pivotal maids, serve as an accusatory Greek chorus and also as barbed comic relief. In Hades--where "people are now free to speak what they think in a way they weren't free in life"--they've finally gained the voices that Homer denied them. The maids' version is not the same--it usually isn't. They always know too much (75).

In a way, her novella partly fills the void left by the classical Grecian myth on Penelope by Homer. If truth be told, Atwood in *The Penelopiad* interweaves the texture of the Homeric myth on Penelope in several ways and knits the form of narration in a differing direction.

Corresponding to the same fact above mentioned, the editor of *The Guardian* claims the novella as incredible one. He examines and scores: "Atwood takes Penelope's part with tremendous verve . . . She explores the very nature of mythic

story-telling” (65). Atwood heads a list of authors who like to ink on giving the Greek myths a modern makeover. She, in this reworking of *The Penelopiad*, subverts the orthodox version of the Greek myth. Atwood’s novella has more stimulatingly reviewed the restrictions of stereotypical Homeric myth on Penelope and fruition of the demystification of myths and storytelling. For writers like Marina Warner, Jack Zipes, David Lewis-Williams and Carlo Ginzburg, Atwood is believed to be one of the major writers who investigated the boundaries and evolution of myths and storytelling. Thus, Atwood’s takeover of the Homeric myth on Penelope is more successful, if not awfully amazing. Another critic, Valerie Miner in *Women’s Reviews of Books*, appreciates the novella for its qualitative demonstration of agencies and its meta-fictional narration. Miner examines, “Odysseus’s wife demonstrates more agency and complexity than in most versions or interpretations of Homer’s epic poem, *The Odyssey*. Long fascinated by myth and archetype, Atwood is a natural choice to summon Penelope’s “true” story by employing a metafictional narrator” (21).

Atwood has reconstructed a unique narrative form, which directly has made complaints against the stereotypical form of the mythic culture. She makes Penelope narrate the story with an ironic wit and a mastery of great ideas.

Likewise, the editor in *The Washington Times* valorizes the artistic simulation of the myth by the author and the capability to relate it to life. He remarks, “Atwood paints a shrewdly insightful picture of what life in those days might actually have been like” (12). The editor further appreciates the clever reproduction of the myth by Atwood and her skill to relate it to existence of each individual. He further contends, “By turns slyly funny and fiercely indignant, Ms. Atwood’s imaginative, ingeniously constructed ‘deconstruction’ of the old tale reveals it in a new – and refreshingly

different – light” (12). Atwood dares to interrogate the Homeric perception of Penelope myth and gives a counter narrative on it. While demystifying the Penelope myth, she collects the mythic materials that Homer knowingly or unknowingly did not use.

Since women are voiceless in the Homeric myth, Atwood has given voice to the voiceless. Penelope, twelve Maids and other slaves are allowed to speak, which at the end reveals the politics of storytelling. Shannon Carpenter Collins notes that the novella is written from the point of view of women. Collins writes, “What Atwood does different is give voice to those voiceless maidens, the slaves of Penelope, the consorts of the suitors, and the victims of Odysseus and Telemachus. [...] The story the Maids manage to tell will, in the end, indict the politics of storytelling itself” (59).

The mental and emotional life of female in the Homeric myth represents an example of gender inequality. For this reason, Atwood in *The Penelopiad* liberates the female characters in every aspect possible. David Glover and Cora Kaplan in *Gender* (2009) argue that feminists in the twentieth century “have given renewed attention to the way in which women’s mental and emotional life has been theorized” (35). Similar to this notion, it can be justified that Atwood’s attempt to bring the female characters at focal point is nothing but the renewed attention.

Atwood’s novella can be viewed as a postmodern narrative as well. Since the narrative in this novella has discarded the validity of the long established but biased patriarchal narration, Atwood’s attempt can be taken as the reconfiguration of the narrative as well. Saman Khalid views Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* as a postmodern fiction written in postmodern narrative. He says that the novella is, “Homer’s tale was recited by an omniscient narrator; Atwood features two centers of consciousness:

Penelope's and her handmaids. Atwood's fiction openly subverts the consensual and conventional patriarchal thinking prevalent in the times of Homer" (3).

No doubt, the novella is the first-rated account of the renowned ancient Greek myth with some noteworthy alternatives, as the above mentioned critics viewed at it. Nonetheless, this research analyzes why the author demystifies the ancient Greek myth about Penelope almost destabilizing the structure and point of view from the previous version of myth in *The Odyssey*.

Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, the daughter of the King Icarus of Sparta, the cousin of Helen of Troy, and the mother of Telemachus, tells her story in *The Penelopiad* from her own perspective. This is a story based on what remains on the other side of the coin when all these identity markers are subtracted. Being an alternative version of the great myth of *The Odyssey*, the novel is an ontological attack on origin as it destroys the notion of truth. The account of the twelve house cleaners of Penelope who were killed by Telemachus on Odysseus's order pluralizes not only Odysseus' account in *The Odyssey* but also Penelope's in *The Penelopiad*. The multiplication of the myth not only invalidates the notion of simple truth or origin, but also negates the male account of history or memory. The account of Homer about Penelope in *The Odyssey* as a faithful, constant, intelligent wife and mother is different from Atwood's account of her in *The Penelopiad* as a self-conscious, self-sufficient, manipulative, productive and ambitious woman. Odysseus, the great warrior and the witty, talented, inventive hero who made a fool of her and "got away with everything" (2) is the husband of Penelope. In contrast to the idea of Penelope as an all-suffering, reliable, understanding wife, she is fully aware of her husband's true color: "I knew he was tricky and a liar, I just didn't think he would play his tricks and try out his lies on me" (2). The reason why she did not ask questions about his

‘unscrupulousness’ is because she “wanted happy endings in those days”: “And happy endings are best achieved by keeping the right doors locked and going to sleep during the rampages” (3). Despite Penelope’s enduring disposition and exceptional efforts, the myth was quite different from her experience: they turned her to a story she did not like to hear.

Moreover, the official account of the events is used as an example to shape and fit other women into roles they do not fit:

Hadn’t I been faithful? Hadn’t I waited, and waited, and waited,
despite the temptation -almost the compulsion- to do otherwise? And
what did I amount to, once the official version gained ground? An
edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with. Why couldn’t
they be as considerate, as trustworthy, as all suffering as I had been?
That was the line they took, the singers, the yarnspinners.
Don’t follow my example, I wanted to scream in your ears –yes, yours!
But when I try to scream, I sound like an owl (2).

The dominating and suppressing traits of myth are then emphasized by Atwood as Penelope, from underworld, attempts to warn modern readers. The private version of Penelope is different from the executive version of the myth. It signifies that myths should be a medium to organize individual behaviors, roles and spaces in real manner.

The ambiguity of the starting point too is demonstrated when Penelope starts telling her story - as there is not a single, simple, original beginning, she is unknown from where to begin: “Where shall I begin? There are only two choices: at the beginning or not at the beginning. The real beginning would be the beginning of the world, after which one thing has led to another; but since there are differences of opinion about that, I’ll begin with my own birth” (7).

As there are different versions of the same story, there are multiple beginnings. Atwood, at this point, refers to myths in general regarding their subject matter about the origin of life or the beginning of the world, and argues that as there is not one fixed truth, there is not one beginning; not one transcendental signified that other signifiers end up with. The possibility of many beginnings is in accordance with the poststructuralist idea of the 'free play of signifiers', with the possibility of multiple meanings and the various 'originary' traces rather than the original; as Jonathan Culler notes: "It is non-origin that is originary" (88).

The possibility of endings is multiple as is the possibility of beginnings. Talking from the dead men's land, Penelope states that they can themselves be reborn and try their chances in other lives provided that they drink from the 'waters of forgetfulness' and wipe all that is in their memories. By adding, "Such is the theory; but like all theories, it's only a theory" (186), Hilde Staels believes that Penelope "questions the logos or traditional interpretation of mythology, specifically the theory of the ritual origin of myth" (103).

The parental ambiguity in *The Penelopiad* also destroys the certainty and centrality of origin. The beautiful Helen of Troy, Penelope's cousin, is claimed to have "come out of an egg, being the daughter of Zeus who'd raped her mother in the form of a swan" (20). On the other hand, the mighty Odysseus's grandfather, a trickster figure, claimed that the god Hermes, the god of thieves, liars and frauds, was his father. Another rumor is that Anticleia, Odysseus's mother was seduced by Sisyphus, who was said "to have cheated Death twice" (46) and that tricky Sisyphus was Odysseus' real father. Penelope concludes that her husband's basic qualities of slipperiness, foxiness and cunningness were not unexpected when these rumors were

considered: “Odysseus had crafty and unscrupulous men on two of the main branches of his family tree” (47).

The ambiguity of both Helen and Odysseus not only dismantles the illusion of origin but also demythologizes the divinity of these characters by involving rape, seduction, adultery, cheating and so forth. At this point it might be interesting to give a hearing to Warner, who cites Helen in Euripides’s play about her own declaration on the ambiguity of her origin: “The anxiety about the status of the story is revealing; it shows how the myth’s incongruity persisted and that the idea of a human woman laying eggs after mating with a swan could not settle into a fixed form” (98).

The difference between the accounts of Helen and Odysseus about Helen’s abduction by Theseus and his pal Peirithus when she was twelve is another instance in *The Penelopiad* which displays the content of grand myths. Not only ‘the official version’ of the story contradicts with what actually happened, but also the experiences of different persona contradict with each other. Odysseus’s account of Helen’s abduction states that Theseus did not rape Helen, “or so it was said” because she was only a child, while according to Helen, both men were so overwhelmed by her divine beauty that “they grew faint whenever they looked at her, and could barely come close enough to clasp her knees and beg forgiveness for their audacity” (75).

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida states, “History and knowledge, *istoria* and *epistémè* have always been determined (and not only etymologically or philosophically) as detours for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence” (10). Therefore, history as well as knowledge is a construct, configured by the organizing principle of Western epistemology which is the metaphysics of presence. History as a factor as a linear plane of events in which one cause leads to one effect leading to another is thus an expression of logo-centric thought. Culler by stating that “meaning

is context-bound but context is boundless” (123) underlines the impossibility of the traditional philosophical context of history as a dependable source of meaning.

Derrida states in *Positions* that the metaphysical character of the concept of history “is not only linked to linearity, but to an entire system of implications (teleology, eschatology, elevating and interiorizing accumulation of meaning, a certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of continuity, of truth, etc.)” (57). Therefore, any attack on linearity, teleology or “traditionality”, along with origin, is an attack on the metaphysics of presence and logos.

The various gossips and charges about Penelope and her relationship with the Suitors are one of the most outstanding examples of textuality of history. Penelope states that these rumors about her are “completely untrue” and gives “rational” explanations for each gossip. One of the “slandorous gossips that have been going the rounds for the past two or three thousand years” is about her sexual conduct with Amphinomus, the politest suitor (143). Penelope accepts her affinity with him and states that she accepted expensive gifts from the Suitors because they were eating up Odysseus’ estate. Another rumor has it that she had sex with all the Suitors, ending up giving birth to the Great God Pan. Yet another rumor explains the reason why Anticleia said nothing to her son Odysseus about the Suitors when he spoke to her on the Island of the Dead for she would have been obliged to explain Penelope’s infidelity in case the Suitors were mentioned. Others claimed that the reason why Odysseus disguised was because of his distrust of his wife, and that was also the reason why he preferred to get help from Eurycleia instead of Penelope when he slaughtered the Suitors and the Maids. Penelope says that she was locked up because Odysseus knew how emotional and tender-hearted she was and he did not want to expose her to dangers.

Some people also claimed that the reason why Penelope kept the impudent maids under the roof of mighty Odysseus is because she was also whoring like them. This last claim lies at the heart of the novel as the hanging of the twelve maids remains a question in both *The Odyssey* and *The Penelopiad*. Atwood states in the introduction of her novella:

The maids form a chanting and singing Chorus which focuses on two questions that must pose themselves after any close reading of *The Odyssey*: what led to the hanging of the maids, and what was Penelope really up to? The story as told in *The Odyssey* doesn't hold water: there are too many inconsistencies. "I've always been haunted by the hanged maids; and, in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself" (xv).

Penelope's account of the story admits the hanging of the maids as her fault and explains that she used the maids to gather information about the Suitors. However, she argues that she did not mean any harm to them and claims that she loved them as 'sisters' and that these twelve maids were very valuable for her as she brought them up. They were the ones who helped her with the weaving and unweaving of the shroud for more than three years. She told them "to hang around the Suitors and spy on them, using whatever enticing arts they could invent" (115). Though they were raped and abused, Penelope told them it was one of the ways to serve their master. The entire book reads like an indictment.

Thus *The Penelopiad* is the story of modern Penelope because Atwood has treated her as modern. It means she has recreated a kind of new identity in the novella. The boldness in the characters especially the frankness of Penelope, her maturity and confidence clearly shows that Atwood has revisited the myth from feminist perspective. The thesis divides the chapters in three sections. The first chapter is the

overall introduction of the research including research question, hypothesis, objectives and literature review. The second chapter is a thorough analysis of the text including theoretical modality in embedded form. The third chapter is the conclusion of the research, which briefly summarizes the overall project.

Chapter II. Redefining Female Existence and Identity in Atwood's *The Penelopiad*

The Penelopiad by Margaret Atwood is a contemporary twist to the ancient myth of Homer's *The Odyssey*. This chapter investigates the way Atwood, in contrary with the heroic codes of the Homeric texts and with the patriarchal nature of Greek mythology – specifically exemplified in *The Odyssey* by the hanging of Penelope's twelve maids on Odysseus's orders, retells the episode by recreating the characters not just from Homeric but also from other mythic materials as well. There are steps of redefining on women's history, which helps identify the evolution of women's historical viewpoints. *The Penelopiad* addresses the historical causes of women's otherness from the point of view of the women's rights generally weak and the inferior status of their roots.

The Penelopiad is set in ancient Greek society where for the most part women and lower classes were ruthlessly dominated and kept silent. This bestows the characters' actions and voices. It gives voice to the voiceless women as Atwood notes towards the end of the book, "We had no voice, we had no name, we had no choice, we had one face" (195). Atwood has used mythology in much the same way she has used other subtexts like fairy tales, folk tales, and legends, replaying the aged tales in innovative milieu and from diverse outlook. So, the stories shine with up-to-the-minute significance.

An American literary critic and radical feminist, Elaine Showalter's *Literature of Their Own* (1977) is an innovative bang of feminist literary studies. She talks about the 'legacy' of feminism and feminist criticism. She spotlights on how women's literature evolved and continued. She traces about the tradition of women's literature. In her writing called *Twenty Years On: A Literature of Their Own Revisited* (1998), She explores the relationship between the 'dominated and a muted culture' (404). As

Atwood in *The Penelopiad*, Showalter also tries to prove that every 'muted culture' has a history 'of its own' (404). She rhetorically questions:

Does a muted culture have a history and a literature of its own, or must it always be measured according to the chronology, standards, and values of the dominant? Can a minority criticism develop its own methods and theories through wide and careful reading of its own literary texts? How does a literary subculture evolve and change? The disciplines with answers for such questions were not philosophy and linguistics, but cultural anthropology and social history (404).

The orthodox version of the male-guided literature has now been subverted. Female writer's representation in the canon and the dignified representation of female characters in the literature have been justified with the significant attempts of Showalter, Beauvoir and Atwood in their respective works.

Showalter, in her *Toward a Feminist Poetics* (1971), has declared partition of 'female literary history' into three phases. The first is 'feminine' (1231) phase that begun from 1840 and ended in 1880, in which female writers imitated men. The second is 'feminist' (1231) phase that begun from 1880 and ended in 1920, in which female writers protested politically in their writings. The third is 'female' (1232) phase that begun from 1920 to present, in this phase the notion of self-discovery in women's writing has become prevalent. Sarah Gamble in *Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* (2001) writes that "Showalter coined the term 'gynocriticism' to describe the practice whereby the 'psychodynamics of female creativity' can be explored and recorded" (296).

Showalter divides the feminist criticism into two divergent categories. The first category is "woman as reader" (1225). According to Showalter, woman in this

category gets through the “male-produced literature” (1225). She argues that the hypothesis of such readers changes the apprehension of the text. She assumes it as a “feminist critique” (1226) and thus, “it is the historically grounded inquiry” (1226), which in fact derives the “assumptions of literary phenomena” (1226). Furthermore, the second category as she defines is “woman as writer” (1226). She opines:

The second type of feminist criticism is concerned with woman as writer - with woman as the producer of textual meaning with the history, themes, genres, and structure of literature by woman. Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of individual or collective female literary career; literary history; and, of course, studies of particular writers and works (1226).

Atwood's *The Penelopiad* attempts to free up the female history. The autonomy and individual rights of females is expressed through the perspective of female characters including Penelope and 12 Maids. Corresponding to the same fact, Lisha H.

Schwartzman in *Challenging Liberalism: Feminism as Political Critique* (2006) argues, “The ideals and concepts of liberalism have been used in feminist struggles for liberation throughout recent history. From the time of the women’s suffrage movement to the more recent battles over abortion, women have formulated their demands in terms of equality, autonomy, and individual rights” (01).

In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood insists on female individuality. She makes the female characters lead the novella. She resumes the Homeric myth in her own perception. Atwood, by revisiting the story of Penelope and the twelve maids, revisits the history of the whole females who were duty-bound to live in the corner of history. In particular, this narrative recaps Penelope’s being and at the same time demystifies

the Penelope prodigy from contemporary point of view. However, the narrator in this novella makes an adapted reply to *The Odyssey*. Penelope tells the story of her own from the underworld. To deconstruct the Homeric epic where she was presented as the mock-up and exemplary faithful wife, the narrator, Penelope, in the revisionist version of Atwood speak about her childhood in Sparta, which was not the matter of any significance to Homer. Likewise, she speaks about her twelve friendly maids, who were regarded as ‘evil’ in Homeric version. By the same token, she takes pride in her ability for keeping over 100 suitors at bay all through Odysseus’s absence. In this way, Penelope narrates her story with pride and explores her individuality.

The orthodox Homeric myth constantly decorated the supposed valiant mythological composition and risky deeds of Odysseus. The out-of-the-sights conducts of Odysseus are exaggerated while the visible episodes of female characters are told in rush. Nevertheless, in *The Penelopiad*, Atwood does highlight the stories and deeds of major character Penelope, Helen, Anticlea, Eurycleia – the sidelined women of history. Thus, in *The Penelopiad*, Atwood retells stereotypical Penelope myth by invalidating its extra-powered forms, structures, roles and spaces. So, this research contends that the act of presenting female characters as bold and assertive reflects Atwood’s objective of recording feminist critique through deconstructing the Penelope myth.

The feminist historiography is premised on the understanding that females’ relationship to their past is ultimately is a lived one and it is this experience of time and history that renders their historical inquires relevant and necessary. Asha Jayant notes: “it [feminist historiography] cannot deny the experience of oppression and suffering we, as women, live through. It cannot afford to institute a search for its

golden moment in history, in a past that has been used, time and again, against women” (173-76).

The way Atwood assumes that females are sidelined from the mainstream of literature and socio-economic dynamics, Valerie Bryson in *Gender and the politics of time: Feminist Theory and Contemporary Debates* (2007) argues that females are sidelined from the beginning of the history, “it is politically necessary to act in the name of women’s collective identity even if the goal is to resist it” (65). She spotlights:

[...] because the world often behaves as if women are a collective group and this is a source of collective oppression in a patriarchal society, it is politically necessary to act in the name of women’s collective identity even if the goal is to resist it. This means that women need to reclaim their history and to recognise and assert their time needs and interests, as these will otherwise be marginalised and bound up with a range of other disadvantages (65).

Quite similarly, the past life of the sidelined heroine, Penelope, corresponds as her story is exposed as “the quintessential faithful wife, a woman known for her intelligence and constancy” (xiii). Atwood declares how *The Odyssey* ends with the slaughtering of the suitors by Odysseus and Telemachus, the hanging of the ‘unfaithful’ maids and the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope. She goes on to say, *The Odyssey* was not the single version of the story, for a myth could be told in different ways in different places.

Therefore, to recap Penelope’s story, and chiefly the details of her descent, her early life and marriage, and the scandalous rumors about her, Atwood collects resources and indications from other sources. In other words, the outline of Penelope

in the original text has always been recognized with faithfulness. Actually, if one is asked to portray Penelope, 'faithful' or 'loyal' would most likely be the first words. Atwood projects Penelope as bold and rebellious. Atwood justifies her writing by explaining her reason for giving voice to Penelope and to the twelve maids:

I've chosen to give the telling of the story to Penelope and to the twelve hanged maids. The maids form a chanting and singing Chorus which focuses on two questions that must pose themselves after any close reading of *The Odyssey*: what led to the hanging of the maids, and what was Penelope really up to. The story as told in *The Odyssey* doesn't hold water; there are too many inconsistencies. I've always been haunted by the hanged maids; and, in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself (xv).

Atwood re-creates the myth by rewriting the episodes from *The Odyssey* as described in the epigraph, since, according to her, the episode of the hanging is not sufficiently justified, nor are Penelope's real plans clear.

Atwood, in her several accounts related to myths, gives details of Penelope's parentage and her upbringing. In an early scene, it is revealed that Penelope's father tries to murder her by drowning her. This event echoes an account of Oedipus, which provides a prevailing design in the story. For example, this can be compared with a statement that Penelope says - eating meat, though satirically. Later, as the story advances, Penelope turns to be a woman as clever and scheming as Odysseus. Thus, Atwood has given us the clues to know the 'inner feelings' of Penelope. For example, we can feel how angry she is with her son and husband, Telemachus and Odysseus, when they massacred the 12 friendly Maids of her.

Atwood sarcastically depicts Penelope's marriage as a commodified object which the males consume. Penelope assumes herself as a piece of meat to be eaten by her husband: "And so I was handed over to Odysseus, like a package of meat. A package of meat in a wrapping of gold, mind you. A sort of gilded blood pudding" (39). This recounting is dissimilar from the original myth because in Atwood's narration Penelope is aware of her circumstances, which makes her bold and rebellious. In other words, she has gender consciousness. As a result, she regards herself as witty. Penelope is competent to endure with her position unbroken for the reason that she is 'clever' (29). She would wish to be gorgeous, but she repentantly admits that "I was not a man eater, I was not a Siren, I was not like cousin Helen..." (29). Nevertheless, like her good-looking cousin, whose power lies in her aptitude to sway men, Penelope also gains power throughout her alliance and access to powerful men. Where Helen's means is beauty, Penelope uses her intelligence so as to ally herself with the men who control the circumstances of her life. She makes use of her mother (a Naiad- water nymph)'s advice, given on her wedding day. Her mother tells her:

Water does not resist. Water flows. When you plunge your hand into it, all you feel is a caress. Water is not a solid wall; it will not stop you. But water always goes where it wants to go, and nothing in the end can stand against it. Water is patient. Dripping water wears away a stone. Remember that, my child. Remember you are half water. If you can't go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does (43).

For that reason, Penelope turns out to be like water, flowing amid the cracks of everyone else's story. If not an asset, her endurance is definitely first-class tactic. Waiting for her husband's homecoming; stay as long as it takes. Her patience wears

away the rumors. Penelope's need to align herself with the men in power is emphasized by her conduct of the suitors who surround her home. She has to make them happy enough to be competent to put them off, to avoid them from acting steeply, to discard their proposal to marry one of them. So she manipulates them. "It's . . . true" (143). She acknowledges that "I led the Suitors on and made private promises to some of them, but this was a matter of policy" (143). Here, her survival means keeping the suitors contented devoid of losing her high merit. In fact, such equilibrium is as greatly audacious as Odysseus ever needed in his wandering.

Penelope's endurance, nevertheless, is not free of its cost. At the end, she is incapable to save her 12 Maids from Odysseus' retaliation. Penelope used the Maids as secret agents so as to tackle the Suitors. She was thinking to do no harm to the Maids, but her policy worked adjacent to the best concern of them: "This plan came to grief. Several of the girls were unfortunately raped, others were seduced, or were hard pressed and decided that it was better to give in than to resist" (115). Penelope spots that her "actions were ill-considered and caused harm" (118). But she had to please the suitors to keep them patient.

As soon as Odysseus returns home, he is told by Eurycleia that the Maids companioned with the enemy (suitors). He slaughters the suitors. The childhood buddy of the Maids, Telemachus, then hangs the Maids, "twenty-four twitching feet" (191). Penelope has been 'locked up' in her room during the slaughter of the Suitors and its aftermath. She had not shared the real story about Maids to Eurycleia. She laments it seriously. However, she meets Odysseus unruffled, and without comment. Still she follows the cautious path:

What could I do? Lamentation wouldn't bring my lovely girls back to life. I bit my tongue. It's a wonder I had any tongue left, so frequently

had I bitten it over the years. Dead is dead, I told myself. I'll say prayers and perform sacrifices for their souls. But I'll have to do it in secret, or Odysseus will suspect me, as well (160).

To shield her own standing, she cannot frankly weep for the young Maids' death of which she was responsible by some means. To weep frankly for the death of the 12 Maids, she would have to lose the approval of the powerful males of her world, and in doing so lose her own status. So, she is unwilling to do so.

As Jill Matthews remarks, "Women have been absent from history; that absence matters, therefore women must be restored to history" (147), and by illustrating the reference of Homeric myth, Atwood records her as well as all women's history for that matter. In this regard Matthews writes:

Women's history is that which seeks to add women to the traditional concerns of historical investigation and writing; feminist history is that which seeks to change the very nature of traditional history by incorporating gender into all historical analysis and understanding. And the purpose of that change is political: to challenge the practices of the historical discipline that have belittled and oppressed women, and to create practices that allow women an autonomy and space for self-definition (148).

Thus, Women's myth and history are significant in liberating certain types of women, certain types of behavior, and things similar to men that are 'overlooked'. These complement the traditional history and myth.

At the same time, as *The Odyssey* explains to us about Penelope by means of the images projected by Agamemnon in the first epigraph, Atwood makes Penelope speak of herself and present her version of her own story, by this means reconfiguring

the Homeric images and myth. And, in the succeeding epigraph, Homer illustrates the episode of the twelve maids while Atwood in *The Penelopiad* lets the Maids speak themselves. The Maids narrate their own story in chapters ii, iv, viii, x, xiii, xvii, xxi, xxiv, xxvi, xxviii and xxix. In chapters ii, x, xxvi and xxviii they blame Telemachus and Odysseus for hanging them. In the chapter xxi they also complain Penelope for their hanging. Quite similarly, through the voice of the Maids in chapter xiii, Atwood deconstructs the Homeric images of Odysseus.

Gerda Lerner, who is one of the pioneers of ‘feminist historiography’, argues that the history of the world is nothing but a kind of conflict between male and female. She defines history as the record of the operation of female. She argues that the universal history is about the ‘tensions between the two cultures: male and female’. History in *The Penelopiad* is described and redefined according to Lerner’s perspective also. Thus, this attempt justifies that women are redefining their own suppressed history.

Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* conceptualizes that the male writer’s representation of females as the ‘second sex’ is nothing but a continuation of male domination from the myth to modern time. She argues that males have ‘entertained a great variety of beliefs’ (37) without scientific bases. She criticizes Aristotle, who, she believes, prescribed an unscientific notion of biology. Aristotle ‘fancied’:

[T]he fetus arose from the union of sperm and menstrual blood, woman furnishing only passive matter while the male principle contributed forces, activity, movement, life. Hippocrates held to a similar doctrine, recognizing two kinds of seed, the weak or female and the strong or male (37).

For Beauvoir, males are privileged due to the 'social myths' in the society. Firstly, the myth disregarded females' roles, structures, and spaces in social business. Thus, it happened in Aristotle's notion also. Such biased notions are in existence from ancient time and are fuelled by the unscientific notions of thinkers like Aristotle did in the Middle Ages. Accordingly, the Homeric version of myth failed to honor female identity, which later Atwood attempts to compensate with the revisionist version, *The Penelopiad*.

Regarding Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Claudia Card argues that "historical change and individual development" is significant. She opines, "Beauvoir knows not simply to tell a 'lovely story', but rather to tell a broadly truthful story of a situated personal development, a life in history -- a Becoming" (214). The situation of females regarding the biology, economy, and society has let them known as 'the Other'. Card argues that the questions Beauvoir puts to her readers in the introduction of *The Second Sex*, 'How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfillment? What roads are open to her? Which are blocked? How can independence be recovered in a state of dependency? What circumstances limit woman's liberty and how can they be overcome?' (SS 29), act as the catalyst to encourage female to "break free" (283) from the situation of 'the other'.

The Penelopiad is divided into twenty-nine chapters, eighteen of which are narrated by Penelope as a burlesque counterpoint. The other eleven chapters are chorused by the twelve hanged Maids. The most important thing is that all the chapters, no matter either Penelope narrated or the twelve Maids chorused, are the discoveries of their own stories. It can be explained that women were expelled, by virtue of "historical contingencies," all of the genres which Catherine Gallagher groups together under the heading of "fiction" increasingly tended to be gendered as

feminine (qtd. in Kolbrener 5). Furthermore, an innovative distinction in the narrative can be observed. For example, Homer in *The Odyssey* sings the deeds of the hero while in *The Penelopiad* the heroine reconstructs her real story as a narrator. This narrative strategy therefore becomes a crucial procedure of apprehension, because the narrator becomes the main character and the readers can easily identify this with the use of 'I'.

In *The Odyssey*, the maids are voiceless. Except Melantho and Eurycleia, we recognize nothing regarding women's individuality. Eurynome emerges several times in the text, yet we do not know about her family. There are no references to the story of the maids, because that would not represent a striking theme for Homer and his particular readers. But Atwood in *The Penelopiad* presents the Maids as a chorus with their own voice to make their story noticeable in several chapters. As mentioned above, the Maids also counterpoint Penelope's narrative thereby undermining Homeric account and the heroine's account as well.

The Maids are forced to work for their masters since they were children. They played with Telemachus who later turned to be an executioner. Their dreams for liberty and happiness are unfulfilled. They are subjected to regular rape by the suitors with no one preventing it. The maids blame Odysseus for their execution; they even blame Penelope for this indictment - because Penelope failed to expose the reality of them to Odysseus. The maids retell their hanging:

You roped us in, you strung us up, you left us dangling like clothes on a line. What hijinks! What kicks! How virtuous you felt, how righteous, how purified, now that you'd got rid of the plump young dirty dirt-girls inside your head! [...]. Why did you murder us? What had we done to you that required our deaths? You never answered that.

It was an act of grudging, it was an act of spite, it was an honour killing (192-3).

It evidently reflects how Atwood rejects the Homeric version in which the Maids were represented as guilty and their hanging was nothing but 'washing' the evil. Thus, the washing of the evil is regarded as the honor of Odysseus. In this regard Auerbach observes that Greek text is restricted to the main characters' political mobility. He illustrates the plight of a Maid in the original text:

Eurycleia spent her life in the service of the Laertiades family, is intimately linked to their destiny, loves them and shares their interests and feelings. But she has neither a life nor feelings of her own: she has only those of her masters. With this one arrives at the realization that life, in the Homeric poems, only takes place in the aristocratic classes – everything that belongs to the world outside this circle only participates in a subservient way (18-20).

The above mentioned passage confirms Eurycleia has no private life. The upper class is so patriarchal and by nature feudal aristocrat. In the feudal aristocracy, most often, people are guided by the principle of fighting, feasts and market manifestation which is thought to be heroism while women are treated as housewives in the household to look after the maids.

The insight of the genre in *The Penelopiad* continues elsewhere in the text. Unlike the epic tradition, everything becomes conflicting in the novella. According to the epic tradition, epic should spin around a sublime, memorable and serious subject matter about wars, kings and the fighters. This is clearly reflected in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* too. The first valorizes the distress of the Greeks and Trojans in the Trojan War while the second narrates every major and minor deeds (fights and adventures) of

Odysseus, even though he is absent in many cases. Likewise, the killings of 100 suitors and the hanging of the Maids is depicted as the heroism of Odysseus when he returns to Ithaca after 10 years. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were created around eighth century, and are exemplified as primitive epics, being anonymous and/or a kind of collective creation, of which the poet was the rhapsodist or compiler. The general ethic in such epic is to establish the so-called heroism mixed with the fantasy of the poets thereby presenting the hero with super power. The Homeric hero as Odysseus is also characterized by his power and physical/moral courage, and presented as a superman who defeated all the enemies and dangers he faced.

In epic tradition, issue of love has been regarded as nothing but the complement of war feats and heroism. In *The Odyssey*, love is reduced at its minimum until Odysseus returns and meets with Penelope. They returned to their old familiar bed and “they loved so well” (338-9). This can be taken as romanticizing and glorifying the retirement of so-called hero:

But the royal couple, once they'd reveled in all the longed-for joys of love, reveled in each other's stories, the radiant woman telling of all she'd borne at home, watching them there, the infernal crowd of suitors slaughtering herds of cattle and good fat sheep – [...] And great Odysseus told his wife of all the pains He had dealt out to other men and all the hardships He'd endured himself – his story first to last – And she listened on, enchanted [...] Sleep never sealed her eyes till all was told (342-53).

In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood creatively subverts and demystifies the notion of epic, intensifying and adapting it to her own times. Atwood revisits the epic tradition and

presented it with socio-cultural principles and focuses on the deeds of women by the same token.

Since women are marginalized in the socio-cultural spheres from early times, women are not well-represented in the writings too. Concentrating on such submissive position of females in the writings, it would be suitable to mention about *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. She argues:

There are different kinds of myths. This one, the myth of woman, sublimating a immutable aspect of the human condition – namely, the “division” of humanity into two classes of individuals – is a static myth. It projects into the realm of Platonic ideas, a reality that is directly experienced or is conceptualized on a basis of experience; in place of fact, value, significance, knowledge, empirical law, it substitutes a transcendental idea, timeless, unchangeable, necessary (996).

At this point, Beauvoir assesses critically that the division of humanity regarding gender identity is determined by the patriarchal culture. She argues that myths are based on the binary oppositions. So, myths by nature give less focus to females thereby glorifying and honoring the superiority of males. Such type of binary oppositions is noticed in the Homeric time also. Nevertheless, Atwood chooses the narrative of women, especially Penelope and the 12 Maids. Thus, this rebellious originality lets Atwood adopt her vision ‘with liberty’ so as to make the heroines present another version of the events.

More to the point of *The Odyssey*, Atwood counter argues the historical events by using other materials, such as *Greek Myths* by Robert Graves, creative subversion of the Homeric epic, the artificial or scholarly epic, and the socio-cultural conventions

of the twenty-first century “the pondered product of a developed society” (188), created by a single poet. Further, Atwood has her protagonist but not a ‘hero’, a word by nature biased to female. Penelope, a female protagonist in the novella, manipulates the so called physically/mentally strong males, including the Suitors and Odysseus himself without the physical/mental strength. She makes Odysseus wait for her when he returns to Ithaca, so that she could hide her feelings related to the hanging of her lovely 12 Maids. By the same token, she could hide her feelings and build confidence on her face not to give a chance to Odysseus even to imagine that she would have thrown herself into the arms of all those who claimed to be Odysseus during his absence (170). Before, she used to weave the shroud given by her father-in-law to mislead the suitors and make them turn against one another (172-3). Atwood also includes love scenes of Penelope and Odysseus, not to complement the war feats, but to establish a parallel disparity with the brutal hanging of the naive 12 Maids on Odysseus’ instructions.

Similarly, these love episodes, even if they are ‘tender and magnanimous’ are complemented by Odysseus’s and Penelope’s telling of their own stories; but, in contrast to *The Odyssey*, in which both rejoice in listening to them, Atwood’s Penelope classifies them as ‘invented’, as both were “proficient and shameless liars of long standing” (172-73), thus exposing the ‘invention’ of both husband and wife, as they reveal their ‘lies’ to each other:

And so we climbed into the very same bed where we’d spent a great many happy hours when we were first married [...] I was glad it was dark by then, as in the shadows we both appeared less wizened than we were. [...] After a little time had passed and we were feeling pleased with each other, we took up our old habits of story-telling (172-73).

At this juncture, these two characters are talking about the “habit of story-telling”, which is a kind of revisiting the past. They are revisiting their dark part of history in a new way. They continue:

Odysseus told me of all his travels and difficulties – the nobler versions, with the monsters and the goddesses, rather than the more sordid ones with the innkeepers and whores. [...]. In my turn, I related the tale of the suitors, and my trick with the shroud of Laertes, and my deceitful encouraging of the suitors, and the skilful ways in which I’d misdirected them and led them on and played them off against one another. It’s a wonder either one of us believed a word the other said. But we did. Or so we told each other (171-73).

Concerning the expression of epic, Aristotle agrees that epic tale to be in prose, the rules postulated the use of verse, which should reflect the magnitude of the heroic deeds. For this reason, “the dactylic hexameter maintained until the last verse was the most convenient metrical structure, not only because of the martial pauses which distinguish it” (Moisés 184), but also because of its symmetry, reflecting the unchangeableness of spirit required of the epic narrator, who should keep a distance from the facts.

Atwood uses the conventional expressive means like prose in the chapters in which Penelope narrates her story, and verse, primarily in the chapters where chorus (12 Maids) sings, recites or narrates their stories. Furthermore, she introduces the literary forms and poetic compositions such as elegy in prose, a verse drama, a lecture and a trial video-taped by the maids. This re-elaboration of the expressive means is still further enhanced by the use of the chorus of maids: “While in Greek tragedy the chorus, besides fulfilling the role of collective character, commenting on the actions

and behavior of the other characters in the light of the people's conscience, thereby also becoming the spokesman of the audience" (Onofrio 132). The function of chorus is also re-evaluated in *The Penelopiad*. First of all, it is presented as the essential dramatic part and secondly it insights a perspective in the narrative of Penelope. So that we cannot just assume that the function of chorus in the novella is just a reflective one. The chorus narrates the story against the brutality of Odysseus and the whole Grecian patriarchy. This simply blurs and demystifies the ancient images of heroism and revealing the traditional flaws. The 12 Maids (Chorus) vent their feelings, in "Kiddie Mourn, a Lament by the Maids":

We too were children. We too were born to the wrong parents. Poor parents, slave parents, peasant parents, and serf parents; parents who sold us, parents from whom we were stolen. These parents were not gods, they were not demi-gods, and they were not nymphs or Naiads. We ground the flour for lavish wedding feasts, then we ate the leftovers; we would never have a wedding feast of our own, no rich gifts would be exchanged for us; our bodies had little value. But we wanted to sing and dance too, we wanted to be happy too (13-14).

Additionally, while in Greek tragedy "the chorus remained the conservative soul of the play, the articulate spokesman for traditional religion and society" (Princeton 1993), Atwood's chorus is the spokesman of the maids, who, like Penelope, undermines the Homeric image of Odysseus and of the heroic codes of the times.

The chorus has a satiric and critical function. Atwood willingly corrupts the expressive means of the epic with satirical, witty, affecting, impulsive, significant, philosophical, burlesque and accusatory tone through the mouths of Penelope and her 12 friendly maids. They revive the events of *The Odyssey* in which they participated,

not as heroines, but as secondary characters - neither unbiased nor distanced from the facts as would befit the narrator of an epic, but reliving them by means of their narratives, while still feeling the weight of the patriarchal nature of Greek mythology exerted on their lives and the disastrous consequences that resulted from this authority. Thus, such dialogic characters of *The Penelopiad* embody the disagreement that Atwood tries to solve, as she has to defy the biased standards reflected in *The Odyssey*.

Hence, Atwood is persuading her readers to reflect the human conditions, rather than the destiny of a collectivity of classical epic. Penelope speaks after Odysseus' opinion – about the possibility of returning to the world of the living after drinking from the waters of forgetfulness:

I'll never drink the Waters of Forgetfulness. I can't see the point of it. No; I can see the point, but I don't want to take the risk. My past life was fraught with many difficulties, but who's to say the next one wouldn't be worse? Even with my limited access I can see that the world is just as dangerous as it was in my day, except that the misery and suffering are on a much wider scale. As for human nature, it's as tawdry as ever (188).

Such revelation of truth develops the epic genre, by adding a dimension to it which *The Odyssey* could not have: the individual, as the epic corresponds to “a time previous to that of the individual conscience, and therefore, directed towards the destiny of a collectivity” (Lukács 42).

The epic poem is also portrayed as “the impact of supernatural forces on the heroes” – as much by the intervention of gods on the earthly plane and/or by every change of action, provoked by agents that may or may not be supernatural (Moisés

318). Accordingly *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* are inspired with a paranormal (supernatural) impression that brings gods and heroes, and myths together.

The Penelopiad, representing female like Penelope and the 12 Maids as leading characters, undercuts and distorts the traditional notion of epic about using the male characters with supernatural physical/mental power. According to the traditional notion of epic, male hero is apt in invoking goddess. But Atwood distorts this notion, which can be illustrated in the invocation of the novella that the Maids are invoking a goddess. They demand justice and pray to goddess that the culprit should be punished uncompromisingly and shown to city dwellers. They further pray the goddess to curse the wrongdoer and let him die in torment.

In Greek mythology, if someone committed crime within family there would appear three black goddesses to punish the culprit, but in Atwood's *The Penelopiad* the twelve Maids pray for twelve goddesses representing their numbers, because Odysseus is guilty of murdering 12 Maids not belonging to his own family. The Maids implore:

Oh, Angry Ones, Oh Furies, you are our last hope! We implore you to inflict punishment and exact vengeance on our behalf! Be our defenders, we who had none in life! Smell out Odysseus wherever he goes! From one place to another, from one life to another, whatever disguise he puts on, whatever shape he may take, hunt him down! [...]
Let him never be at rest! (183).

On the other hand, very ridiculously, Odysseus' defense attorney also invokes the goddess Athene with the intention of saving him from being pursued by the Furies: "I call on grey-eyed Pallas Athene, immortal daughter of Zeus, to defend property rights

and the right of a man to be the master in his own house, and to spirit my client away in a cloud!” (184).

The attorney’s invocation to her to protect his client comes to be a parody of the epic genre as occurred in *The Iliad* and in *The Odyssey*. The judge’s reaction confirms the travesty of this trial, as he comments on the din inside the courtroom with the arrival of the Furies, as he addresses the Furies and then the goddess Athene, and finally as he inquires where Odysseus is (Graves 108):

What’s going on? Order! This is a twenty-first-century court of justice!

You there, get down from the ceiling! Stop that barking and hissing!

Madam, cover up your chest and put down your spear! What’s this cloud doing in here? Where are the police? Where’s the defendant?

Where has everyone gone? (184).

Atwood de-articulates the characteristics of the traditional epic. Yet, she re-elaborates the forms of such epic in *The Penelopiad*. She too uses narration, an invocation and an epilogue but reforms on her own way. The articulation of the matter in the opening of the novella is written by Atwood as an author in the Introduction and in Chapter I - “A Low Art”, where Penelope as a spokesperson of author presents her reasons for retelling the facts of her life. The invocation in *The Odyssey* appeals gods to help out the poet for creative undertaking, which is deconstructed in *The Penelopiad*. As she characterizes this skill, as a “low art”: “Now that all the others have run out of air, it’s my turn to do a little story-making. I owe it to myself. I’ve had to work myself up to it: it’s a low art, tale-telling” (3-4).

Mary Poovey reasons that female writings reconfigure women identity from the prejudice of male history. She argues that there are diverse sorts in female writings, which revisit the historiography of women. She comments:

As these scholars demonstrate, recovery of women's rhetoric demand a turn toward alternative sites of oral and written persuasion used both in the public and private domain. The wide range of sites include: speeches, autobiographies, letters, fragments of classical texts, syllabi and other teaching materials, articles, lectures, scholarly work, and pamphlets. Common strategies identified in women's rhetoric across time and cultures include rhetorical strategies such as breaking silence; subverting traditional genres; naming in personal terms or truth telling; employing dialogic, recognizing and using the power of conversation; and valuing collaboration (65).

According to her, female writings claim a hairpin turn from the traditional past. She opines that most frequently women's writings record women's history representing the grand truth and such revelation of truth breaks the silence, which gives voice for women as in *The Penelopiad*.

Patriarchy is a long established but biased social system where the roles of male are privileged as the authority in social institution and academic organization. Fathers take hold of authority over female, children and property in patriarchy, which entails female subordination. Analyzing the patriarchy historically, males control over legal, political, economic and social organization has been manifested clearly.

Most often, males are financially appointed to support a family, while females have to remain inside the doors taking care of the children. They have to handle household expenditure given by males, which is even hard to manage their daily living. Kamla Bhasin argues that patriarchy signifies many things including ideological and institutional. She claims:

Patriarchy is a social and ideological system which considers men to be superior to women, one in which men have more control over resources and decision making. Patriarchy is historically constructed and its form, content and extent can be different in different contexts, and at different times. Like all social systems, patriarchy too has an ideology and structure which together ensure that men are heads of households, inheritors of family name and property. All societal institutions, moreover, are male-dominated (8-9).

The above mentioned extract elucidates what patriarchy is and how it functions. It also demonstrates how the society assembles the design of control of the male over the female. Consequently, there have been traces of male supremacy over female even in literature too.

Narration is regarded as the most extensive part, but only the hero's actions are registered specifically in the classical myths. But, Atwood in *The Penelopiad* significantly reports the accounts of Penelope and her friendly 12 Maids thereby to avoid male hegemony in the narration.

Penelope, in *The Odyssey*, is subordinated to her father firstly, Odysseus secondly and Telemachus thirdly, while her wisdom is the only weapon she really uses to keep the suitors at bay. The 12 Maids in the Homeric myth are subject to the master. They never get chance to work for themselves in reality. But in Atwood's novella, the narrators are the female characters themselves who narrate their own story from Hades, which is a unique but an unusual viewpoint of Atwood. This viewpoint has liberated the narrators, which has made them easy to demystify and lay blame on the classical structure, roles and spaces.

The 'Grand Narrative' in the mythic culture is considered to be an exceeding story which relates the widely held perceptions of society which is always and already biased. But, the reconfiguration of such 'Grand Narrative' by Atwood in her novella results in the weakening of the false standpoint in traditional mythic culture in a strange manner. Thus, in the context of *The Penelopiad*, it can be taken as Atwood's revisiting and subverting the Homeric narrative and reformulation of feminist criticism. No doubt, this novella is a meta-text speaking the failures of *The Odyssey* which is out and out to be revisited and reformulated.

On the one hand, Atwood appoints Penelope to restate her own story regarding Odysseus and the maids differently from Homeric style. On the other hand, she appoints the 12 Maids narrate another side of Odysseus, Penelope and themselves. In this way, Atwood demystifies the mythic genre thereby recording the feminist issues, as she uses it in *The Penelopiad* by reconfiguring the spaces, roles, structures and rules of traditional myth in the twenty-first century. It is in fact a literary post-modernity to revisit the former work from a socio-cultural and critical stance.

In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood subverts the orthodox version of the Greek myth thereby stimulatingly reviewing the restrictions of stereotypical Homeric myth on Penelope and realization of the demystification of myths and storytelling through the perspective of feminist critique. Her invasion of the Homeric myth on Penelope is found to be successful. Thus, the novella is the first-rated explanation of the famous prehistoric Greek myth by means of some notable options. Penelope almost destabilizes the roles, structures, spaces and point of views from the previous account of myth in *The Odyssey*.

In this fashion, Atwood significantly evaluates the patriarchal world through the corner of the eyes of women. The enduring account of Odysseus, which is nothing

but phallogentric ideal and the traditional patriarchal discourse, is destabilized to give voice to female characters like Penelope and her 12 Maids who are rarely taken into account in the early Greek literature. By emphasizing the accounts of Penelope and her 12 Maids in *The Penelopiad*, Homeric myth has been amended to declare those who have been overlooked in history are revisited, readdressed, restructured and empowered through feminist writings. Thus, Atwood's novella has effectively empowered those who were once sidelined.

Chapter III. New Identity and Experience in Atwood's *The Penelopiad*

Depositing a greater emphasis on the feminist critique, Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* demystifies Homer's *The Odyssey*. The Homeric myth always highlighted adventures of Odysseus wandering the seas for about a decade after the Trojan War. Thus, it neglected even the major female characters like Penelope, Eurycleia, Helen, Anticlea and 12 Maids thereby sidelining them in the myth. The Homeric myth always exemplified the masculine fantasy, so, Atwood highlighted the bold acts of the bold females who were important but sidelined in terms of structures, roles and spaces. Similarly, Atwood also deconstructs the genre of epic thereby focusing on the ordinary people rather than those with supernatural power. Importantly, Penelope's story deconstructs the structure of Homeric Myth, while the maid's stories serve as the critique of dominant patriarchal order. Thus, Atwood's contribution has very much significant role in demystifying the myth and rewriting of the feminist revisionist historiography.

The Penelopiad as its title informs is an account from the perception of Penelope, a simple but intelligent woman. As Odysseus in the Homeric myth has to survive by his wits, Penelope too has to live by her wits. Similarly, while Penelope's account is leading, Atwood is very much concerned with the twelve maids hanged by Odysseus and Telemachus after Odysseus' return. In the short chapters written in a range of styles, the main function of the 12 Maids is to serve as the chorus and narrate their own stories, Penelope's account, and Odysseus' so-called bravery.

Atwood pictures the existence of maids, unfortunate orphans and slaves who were victimized in the Homeric myth. On the one hand, Penelope complains that she is treated as 'meat' while Atwood tries to prove that the 12 Maids who are repeatedly raped and killed are the heaps of 'meat' to be eaten and abused by the males.

Penelope frequently expresses sorrow on the massacre of the maids. She cries inside that their death was due to the terrible miscommunication. The Maids had different stories to tell but there emerged unintended stories with their murdering. This fact spotlights that the Maids had stories more significant than that of Penelope, Odysseus and even Atwood and Homer themselves. As the story progresses, we are often reminded by Penelope that she is a liar similar to Odysseus and because of this insight we commence to recognize that there might be something to some of the slanderous rumors she has been protesting in her narrative. Instead of offering Penelope a clear-cut and tough voice that communicates the high merits classically branded with Penelope, Atwood's Penelope is awfully multifaceted, talkative, compassionate and full-grown for disliking biased things. *The Penelopiad* makes a parody not only of the phallogentric literary tradition from and after *The Odyssey*, but also of the novella itself - it is because the novella complicates our accepted wisdom regarding history, memory, and identity.

In this way, *The Penelopiad* is feminist critique in roles, structures and spaces spread during the time of *The Odyssey*. It is presented through Penelope's viewpoint, as an aggressive feminist revisionist view of events. The most important figures are females in the novella, their thoughts are audible, their feelings can be felt, and their tragedy can be empathized easily. Hence, the traditional mythical account has a tendency to 'downsize' woman's spaces, structures, and roles in events so as to keep the truth secret. But Atwood in her novella presents just the opposite tendency thereby revisiting the past with feminist critique.

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